

# 5

Export Certification  
Manual

# Issuing Certificates

## Introduction

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### Introduction

This section contains information about and instructions for completing certificates.



Certificates can only be issued for US exporters and/or their US brokers or freight forwarders. The US exporters and/or their US brokers or freight forwarders must have a physical address in the US in which they conduct business.

The certificates that are endorsed or issued by ACOs are as follows:

- ◆ **PPQ Form 577, Federal Phytosanitary Certificate**
- ◆ **PPQ Form 578, Export Certificate, Processed Plant Products**
- ◆ **PPQ Form 579, Phytosanitary Certificate for Reexport**

USDA-APHIS-PPQ discourages exporters from using certificates as commercial documents. Ultimately, the exporter is responsible for meeting contract or letter of credit requirements and for obtaining consular visas when required by the foreign country.



Contract requirements, letter of credit, or consular visas are **not** phytosanitary conditions. Do not include information that only relates to commercial documents; do not purposely misspell items because of instructions in commercial documents. For letter of credit requirements, see [APHIS Policy on Letters of Credit](#) on **page 5-1-9**.

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## Accountability

To maintain the credibility of the USDA-APHIS-PPQ phytosanitary export certification program, an accountability system was established to deter forgeries and to control public misuse of certificates. As a part of the accountability system, PPQ Forms 577, 578, and 579 are prenumbered in the top, right corner.



All unused prepaid certificates **must** be returned to the **issuing office**.

Exporters and brokers are prohibited from prepaying certificates at one location and forwarding them to another location for authentication.

**Never issue** a certificate that another office is accountable for.

Regarding accountability, ACOs are to perform the following procedures:

1. Record on APHIS Form 80-R, Export Certification Record, in numerical order, all blank certificates prepaid by an exporter, shipper, or broker (see *Special Procedures, User Fees, Figure 6-15-3 on page 6-15-32*).
2. Issue **only** those certificates that your office is accountable for (both Federal and State). Before allowing exporters to prepay for a block of certificates, type or stamp the certificates with the name of your office, the issuing office, in the block, “For Official Use.”
3. Adhere to the issuing office’s responsibilities as follows:
  - A. Keep to a minimum the number of prepaid certificates given out. Supplying exporters, shippers, or brokers with **no** more than a 3-month supply of prepaid certificates is recommended.
  - B. Before supplying prepaid certificates, complete the “Place of Issue” block on the certificates. Failure to do so is considered a major error.
  - C. Instruct exporters to complete **only** the section titled, “Description of the Consignment,” and return the certificate to the issuing office for processing. The exception is when the workload **does not** allow the ACO to complete the certificate.

For this exception, the ACO **must** dictate to the exporter the required information and review what information the exporter filled in.

- D. Have an ACO review a prepaid, partially completed certificate as follows:
  - i. Carefully review the information entered by the exporter to ensure the current procedures have **not** been violated.
  - ii. Record additional declarations. The exception is when the workload **does not** allow the ACO to complete the certificate. For this exception, the ACO **must** dictate to the exporter the required additional declaration and review what information the exporter filled in.
  - iii. Check the wording of the additional declaration for accuracy when the certificate is presented for authentication. If incorrect additional declarations are recorded on a certificate by exporters, then a new certificate **must** be prepared.
- E. Inform exporters that prepaid certificates **must** be returned to the issuing office for refunds or credits, including those certificates voided or otherwise ruined while completing. Exporters are **prohibited** from prepaying for certificates at one location and forwarding them to another location for processing.
- F. Inform exporters that PPQ Form 578 is **not** a phytosanitary certificate and may **not** serve as one for facilitating the entry of processed products. PPQ Form 578 was created to fill a void where **no** other USDA agency certification existed or can be adapted and may **only** be used for those processed products eligible for a PPQ Form 578 as indicated in EXCERPT.

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## Certification Violations

**Only** officials authorized by USDA-APHIS-PPQ can change or correct information on certificates. Unauthorized changes are in violation of 7CFR 353 and may be prosecuted under the Plant Protection Act (7USC 7701) and other applicable laws. When a violation is discovered the PPQ Officer-in-Charge should consider the circumstances surrounding the violation before proceeding to one of the following actions:

- ◆ Issue an APHIS Form 7060, Official Warning, Violation of Federal Regulations (**only** after consulting with the local or regional Investigative and Enforcement Services (IES) officials)

- ◆ Refer a request for investigation to the local IES investigator for further action<sup>1</sup>

PPQ Officers-in-Charge should determine the intent behind the violation and work with the local or regional IES official to make the judgement to either officially warn the violator(s) or pursue prosecution. If the intent is **not** clear or is ambiguous, then PPQ Officers-in-Charge can use their IES counterparts to get a recommendation about which action to take.

Repeat violations or those that have the appearance of an attempt to deceive or commit fraud should be automatically referred to IES investigators for further action. IES in turn will determine if an investigation will be forwarded to the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) for criminal prosecution.

APHIS Form 7060 should be issued when the violation **does not** warrant further action and **only** after consultation with local or regional IES officials. If APHIS Form 7060 is issued, then **no** further action may be taken on this incident by IES.

The following are some examples of violations where APHIS Form 7060 may be used instead of pursuing an investigation (none of the following apply if the exporter is apparently seeking certification of an un-inspected shipment):

- ◆ Correction to the name of the exporter or consignee
- ◆ Decrease in the quantity of declared
- ◆ Correction to or deletion of botanical names of plants
- ◆ Correction to the number (generally **only** decreases) and descriptions of packages, or distinguishing marks
- ◆ Correction to the declared means of conveyance
- ◆ Addition of a letter of credit or other commercial reference

These certification violations are prohibited practices and can result in a foreign government rejecting a certificate and therefore rejecting the shipment. These prohibited practices should **not** warrant a criminal investigation, and unless an attempt to defraud is apparent, these first-time violations would warrant issuance of APHIS Form 7060. USDA-APHIS-PPQ uses APHIS Form 7060 to inform the exporter, shipper, or broker of the violation and to advise them of the correct

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1 For local and regional IES contacts, see web site address: <<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ies/contacts.html>>

procedure to follow for making changes to a certificate. Also, the exporter should be informed of the consequences of failing to follow procedures.

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## Confidentiality

ACOs who issue certificates **must** hold in strict confidence the information in these official documents to protect buyers and exporters. PPQ Forms 553, 572, 577, 578, and 579 frequently contain trade secrets or confidential information, which if disclosed might cause financial harm to buyers and exporters.

Records containing trade secrets and commercial or financial information (obtained from a person) that is privileged or confidential is exempt from mandatory release under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). (See Title 5, United States Code, Section 552(b)(4).) However, the FOIA **only** applies to agency records, those that are in the possession and control of a Federal agency at the time the FOIA request is made.

If someone requests a completed or partially-completed certificate, a State record which provides the basis for a certificate, or any information from these documents then the request **must** be forwarded to the Freedom of Information Act/Privacy Act (FOIA/PA) Officer for USDA-APHIS-PPQ at the following address:

Legislative and Public Affairs Staff, APHIS, USDA  
4700 River Road, Unit 50  
Riverdale, Maryland 20737-1232  
Phone: 301-734-8296

Certificates and State records which provide the basis for certificates that are maintained by State cooperating agencies are **not** subject to the Federal FOIA. However, many States have open government laws which may require the release of records maintained by State agencies. Therefore, if someone requests a completed or partially-completed certificate, a State document which provides the basis for a certificate, or any information in these documents, then the State or county employee should **not** release the document or information unless appropriate State officials determine that release of the document or the information in the document is required by State law.

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## General Guidelines for Completing Certificates

General guidelines for completing all certificates are listed in this section. Specific instructions for completing, distributing, and maintaining each type of certificate are located behind each designated tab for PPQ Form 553, PPQ Form 577, PPQ Form 578, and PPQ Form 579.

The general guidelines cover the following topics:

- ◆ Consolidation
- ◆ Attachment Sheets and Continuation Sheets for Export Certificates
- ◆ Corrections
- ◆ Issuance Date Versus Inspection Date
- ◆ Language and Legibility
- ◆ APHIS Policy on Letters of Credit
- ◆ “Replacing” Lost Certificates
- ◆ “Reissuing” Certificates
- ◆ “Superseding” Certificates
- ◆ Voiding or Returning Unused Certificates

### Consolidation

Any shipment<sup>2</sup> going from interior places by rail or truck to a port for consolidation is eligible for **only** one certificate because the shipment is still **only** one consignment. If it is necessary for an exporter to have a certificate of inspection for each rail car or truck, then USDA-APHIS-PPQ suggests that State certificates be issued for consolidation into one Federal certificate at the port of export.

**Only** issue multiple, original certificates when one of the following conditions exists:

- ◆ Multiple ports of loading in the United States
- ◆ Multiple ports of discharge in the foreign country
- ◆ If bulk grain, multiple berths in the same port
- ◆ Different genera of bulk materials loaded on one carrier
- ◆ If containerized shipments, each van may require an original certificate

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<sup>2</sup> As a working definition for export certification purposes, shipment means one exportation of plants or plant products, from one exporter to one consignee, in one country, on one means of conveyance [7CFR 353]. In most cases, **only** one certificate is issued per shipment.

## Attachment Sheets and Continuation Sheets for Export Certificates

Attachment Sheets (PPQ Form 576) and continuation sheets are permitted only when there is insufficient space in the blocks on certificates to describe the consignment, enter additional declarations, or when the plant protection organization of the foreign country requires an attachment or continuation sheet.



PPQ Form 576 Attachment Sheet can only be used with a Phytosanitary Certificate (PPQ 577) or Phytosanitary Certificate for Reexport (PPQ 579).

When all the required information does not fit on a PPQ 577 or PPQ 579, use PPQ 576.

Continuation sheets can only be used in conjunction with PPQ Form 578, Export Certificate, Processed Plant Products.

### PPQ Form 576 Attachment Sheet for Phytosanitary Certificate or Phytosanitary Certificate for Reexport

When there is insufficient space on PPQ Form 577, Federal Phytosanitary Certificate or PPQ Form 579, Phytosanitary Certificate for Reexport a phytosanitary certificate do the following:

1. In the block of the certificate, ENTER “See attachment.”
2. Fill out PPQ Form 576 Attachment Sheet for Phytosanitary Certificate or Phytosanitary Certificate For Reexport. This form and instructions for filling it out are in [Appendix B](#), beginning on [page-B-1-12](#).

A PDF, fillable, copy of this form and instructions can also be downloaded at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ppq/pim/exports/ppq576.pdf>.

3. Review the listed information for accuracy.
4. Record an Additional Declaration on the certificate that refers to the attached sheets (see below an example of an additional declaration for Block 9).
5. Include the original PPQ Form 576 with the original certificate. Include a copy of the continuation sheet(s) with each copy of the certificate.

**EXAMPLE** “See attachment for a list of produce names and quantity declared.”

### Continuation Sheets

When there is insufficient space on a PPQ Form 578, Export Certificate, Processed Plant Products, do the following:

1. In the block of the certificate, ENTER “See attachment.”

2. List the information on a separate sheet of plain paper without letterhead, unless required by the importing country as specified in the export summary. NEVER use letterhead other than USDA, APHIS, PPQ letterhead.
3. Indicate the name and number of the certificate, if applicable, and the date of issuance at the top of each continuation sheet.
4. Review the listed information for accuracy.
5. Sign each continuation sheet.
6. Include the original continuation sheet(s) with the original certificate. Include a copy of the continuation sheet(s) with each copy of the certificate.

### Corrections

Corrections are either **not** allowed or should be kept to a minimum on certificates.



**Do not** allow errors on certificates when the export summary specifically states that the certificates may contain **no** errors.

**Never** correct information entered in the critical blocks on certificates, unless directed otherwise in the export summary.

**Never** delete entire entries or use opaque correction fluid or correction tape.

### Critical Blocks

Corrections and errors are **not** allowed in the following critical blocks on PPQ Forms 577 and 579:

- ◆ Name of Produce and Quantity Declared (*Block 9*)
- ◆ Botanical Name of Plants (*Block 10*)
- ◆ Number and Description of Packages (*Block 11*)
- ◆ Distinguishing Marks (*Block 12*)
- ◆ Additional Declaration

Corrections and errors are **not** allowed in the following critical blocks on PPQ Form 578:

- ◆ Product (*kind, quantity, and weight*)
- ◆ Identification

### Noncritical Blocks

If acceptable by the foreign country (see the definition of each certificate in the export summary), corrections can be made in noncritical blocks of certificates. Initial the correction(s). ACOs **must** use their best judgment about corrections and erasures. The intent is to prevent having to complete another certificate just for a typographical error.



The proper way to correct a typographical error in a noncritical block is as follows:

1. Use a straight line to line-out the incorrect entry
2. Initial the correction.

**EXAMPLE**

This is a corrected ~~typography~~ error in a noncritical block.  
typographical (daw)

When there is evidence that a certificate has been altered, by someone other than an ACO, in violation of 7CFR 353, then follow the guidelines for determining the action to take. See [Certification Violations](#) on page 5-1-3.

### Issuance Date Versus Inspection Date

The date of issuance for a certificate is the date that the ACO signs the certificate.

The date of inspection is the date that the phytosanitary inspection was conducted by the ACO.

While these two dates are based on two separate actions, the signing of the certificate and the inspection of the commodity, the dates can be the same, only if both actions were conducted on the same day.

### Language and Legibility

Certificates **must** be completed as follows:

- ◆ English language **only**
- ◆ Hand-written certificates must be printed rather than in cursive writing
- ◆ Original and all copies must be legible
- ◆ **No** foreign words or phrases, **except** for Latin binomial names of plants, plant products, and plant pests or plant diseases

### APHIS Policy on Letters of Credit

Exporters or their agents may request ACOs to include Letter of Credit (LC) information or follow instructions provided in a LC when preparing certificates. Letters of Credit are fiduciary, commercial documents that international commerce uses to insure payment. These documents are **NOT** part of the phytosanitary certification process and can not be considered in the certification process.

It is APHIS policy that Letter of Credit (LC) information **cannot** be included on any certificate, unless expressly permitted by APHIS policy (see example below on including LC number in the Distinguishing Marks section of a certificate).

Examples of LC information exporters or their agents may request to have included on a certificate are: LC number and purposeful misspelling(s) of information on PCs.

- ◆ ACOs **cannot** purposely misspell information on a certificate in order to meet LC requirements.
- ◆ The only time that a LC number may be included on a certificate is when the packaging is clearly marked with the LC number. The LC number can then be included in the following:
  - ❖ PPQ 577 and PPQ 579: Block 12 “Distinguishing Marks”
  - ❖ PPQ 578: Block titled “Identification”

When an exporter’s commercial documentation has requirements, with respect to phytosanitary certification, that is against APHIS policy, it is the exporter’s responsibility to have their commercial documents corrected; ACOs **cannot** make exceptions to APHIS policy based on an exporter’s Letter of Credit requirements.

### “Replacing” Lost Certificates

A certificate may be “replaced” when an exporter has **lost** the original certificate and the shipment is not available for inspection. **Only** ACOs at the issuing office (accountability point) can replace an original certificate that cannot be recovered.

Certificates issued to replace previously issued certificates are based on the same inspection date(s) and results of the original certificates because the replacement certificate(s) are **not** based on new inspections. **Only** the date of issuance, on the new certificate, will change. No other changes are authorized on replacement certificates. If information other than the date of issuance changes, refer to the information for superseding a certificate.

Record an additional declaration on the replacement certificate that includes: replaced certificate number, date of issuance, issuing office, and the reason for replacing the original certificate (see example below).

#### EXAMPLE

“This certificate replaces the exporter’s lost original of Federal Phytosanitary Certificate [number], issued on [dated], at [issuing office].”

See also *Special Procedures, User Fees, **Reissuing, Replacing or Superseding Certificates*** on page 6-15-14, when collecting a user fee for replacements.

## “Reissuing” Certificates

The term “Reissue” refers to when a new certificate is issued to substitute for a previously issued certificate. The reissue may be the result of ACO errors or at the request of an exporter for various reasons. **The original certificate must be recovered.** The current policy on reissuing certificates is as follows: **Only** ACOs at the issuing office (accountability point) can reissue completed or partially completed certificates because of changes in the information (such as extensive changes in a critical block or erasures prohibited by the foreign country).



Given the complexity of issues surrounding the reissuance of certificates at other than the originating office, Export Services is reviewing this policy. Until a final review of the policy is completed, certificates may be reissued at offices other than the originating office. In addition, the following will remain in effect: certificates cannot be reissued based on the exporter presenting a photocopy of the original certificate or the shipper's copy. Depending on the circumstances, the ACO may have to contact the originating office for supporting documentation.

Reissued certificates may or may not be based on the same inspection date(s) and results on the original certificates. Whether or not a new inspection is required will depend on the reason the certificate needs to be reissued. When reissuing an certificate, review the time limits for the country to ensure that the certificate will be issued according to the country's time limits.

Because the original certificate must be surrendered when a reissuance is requested, additional declarations regarding the reissuance are neither required nor authorized.

Refer to [Reissuing/Superseding Certificates and Time Limits](#) on page 5-1-12. See also *Special Procedures, User Fees, Reissuing, Replacing or Superseding Certificates* on page 6-15-14 when collecting a user fee for the reissued certificate.

## “Superseding” Certificates

The term “supersede” refers to the situation when a new certificate is issued to substitute for a previously issued certificate that cannot be recovered. Generally, when a certificate needs to be superseded, it is because the foreign NPPO has the original export certificate which contains errors. The superseding certificate may be the result of ACO error or at the request of an exporter for various reasons. **The original certificate cannot be recovered and the shipment is not available for inspection.** This is not the same situation as a lost certificate which is dealt with as a replaced certificate.

Only ACOs at the issuing office (accountability point) can supersede an original certificate that cannot be recovered.

Superseding certificates are based on the same inspection date(s) and results on the original certificates. Because superseding certificates are not based on new inspections, the only date on the new certificate which will change is the date of issuance. Depending on the situation, various information, other than the date of inspection, may be changed. Any and all changes must be according to APHIS policy.

Because the original certificate is not recovered, an additional declaration is required. See the example below.

**EXAMPLE**

*"This certificate supersedes Federal Phytosanitary Certificate [number], issued on [date], at [issuing office], because [reason for issuing a new certificate]."*

Refer to [Reissuing/Superseding Certificates and Time Limits](#) below.

### **Reissuing/Superseding Certificates and Time Limits**

This section provides additional guidance on reissuing or superseding a Phytosanitary Certificate (PC) when the importing country has time limits that require the PC to be issued prior to the consignment being exported.

PCs can be reissued or superseded when a country has time limits requiring the PC be issued prior to exportation, **only** if there are no changes to the consignment. The reissuance or superseding PC may only be issued if the consignment for both the original PC and the reissued or superseding PC is the same. The exception is when there has been a partial shipment.

Additional guidance is provided below:

- ◆ Blocks on PC that **can** be changed
  - ❖ "To: The Plant Protection Organization(s) of": as long as the phytosanitary requirements have been met.
  - ❖ Block 7: Name and Address of the Exporter
  - ❖ Block 8: Declared Name and Address of the Consignee
  - ❖ Block 14: Declared Means of Conveyance
  - ❖ Block 15: Declared Point of Entry
  - ❖ Block 16: Date Issued
  - ❖ Block 17: Name of Authorized Officer
  - ❖ Block 18: Signature of Authorized Officer

◆ Blocks on PC that **can change if certain conditions are met**

- ❖ Block 9: Name of produce and quantity declared – The information in this block may only be changed under the following circumstances:

Partial shipments by shipping line: This is when the total quantity on a PC was not loaded onto a vessel. In this case, the new PC can have a quantity which is less than the original PC. The Additional Declaration (AD) placed on the new PC, in this case, should indicate that the PC was reissued or superseded because the consignment was split by the shipping company. The exporter should present documentation supporting the fact that a partial shipment was made by the shipping line.

- ❖ Block 11: Number and description of packages – The information in this block may only be changed under the following circumstance:

When the circumstances are as outlined above for a partial shipment. Only the number of packages can be changed. The number of packages listed on the reissued or superseded PC can only be less than that on the original PC.

- ❖ Block 12: Distinguishing marks – The information in this block may only be changed under the following circumstance:

When the circumstances are as outlined above for a partial shipment. The distinguishing marks entered in this block **must** have been on the original PC.

For example, bale markings were “Fdre”, “Fghy”, and “Jugt” on the original inspectional record and on the original PC. If there was a partial shipment, these are the only markings that can be used on the reissued or superseded PC.

◆ Blocks on PC that **cannot** change

- ❖ “Date Inspected”
- ❖ Disinfestation and/or Disinfection Treatment
- ❖ Block 10: Botanical Name of Plants
- ❖ Block 13: Place of Origin

◆ Requests for Reissuance of PCs Post-Departure

Prior to exportation, exporters should make every effort to provide Authorized Certification Officials with the correct shipping information, however, if an exporter requests that a PC be reissued or superseded after a consignment has been exported:

- ❖ Only the originating office can supersede a PC
- ❖ Even if the original PC may be recovered, the following Additional Declaration (AD) must be included on the new PC:

“This certificate supersedes Federal Phytosanitary Certificate [number], issued on [date], at [issuing office], because [reason for issuing a new certificate].”

◆ Requests for Certification Post-Departure

Export Services should be notified, through the chain of communication, when an exporter has a consignment enroute to the importing country without the required PC. This will allow PPQ to be proactive rather than reactive, should the consignment be rejected at the port of entry.

### Voiding or Returning Unused Certificates

Issuing offices (accountability points) document on APHIS Form 80-R, Export Certificate Record, when certificates are voided or returned unused by USDA-APHIS-PPQ, the public, or industry. Issuing offices maintain file copies of either original Export Certificate Records or voided certificates. If your Export Certification Specialist wants to be notified of voided certificates consider attaching the original or copy of the voided or returned unused certificate to APHIS Form 80-R in order to substantiate the credit.

For directions on refunding or crediting voided certificates, see *Special Procedures, User Fees, [Handling Refunds and Credits](#)* on page 6-15-24.



All voided certificates (including those ruined while typing or preparing) that were prepaid by exporters **must** be returned to the issuing office (accountability point).

USDA-APHIS-PPQ retains a \$7 administrative fee from the refund or credit for voided certificates.